

JOHN IRELAND.

The distinguished subject of this sketch was born of yeoman parentage, in Hart County, Kentucky, on the 1st of January, 1827. His educational advantages were confined to the common schools of the country; but, actuated by a spirit of determination and self-reliance which buoyed him above the restraints and gyves of circumstance, his endeavors were fixed upon the purpose of achieving an honorable place among men; and bursting the trammels of his early youth, he sought to obtain in the realities of life that knowledge of which his school facilities had afforded him but a thirsting taste.

In 1847 he was appointed deputy sheriff of Hart County, and about a year afterwards was elected constable, which position he held for three years. The knowledge of process and legal business, which the duties of these offices afforded him, directed his ambition to the bar, and in 1851 he began the study of law in the office of Robert D. Murray and Henry C. Wood, at Mumfordsville. He at once impressed into the service of his efforts those habits of close application and patient industry which have attended him through life, which have constructed the sure steps of his advancement and formed the sesame of his great success. So constant and thorough was his progress in mastering the general principles of the common law that in scarcely more than one year he was admitted to the bar and entered upon his practice; but casting about for a new field and more inviting prospects, he was attracted by the glittering future and allurements of the rising empire of the Southwest, and in 1853 removed to Texas and settled in Seguin, where he began the erection of his fame, and which has ever since been his unofficial home. Here his sterling qual-



Yours Truly
Geo. Ireland

ities were recognized by his fellow-citizens, and in 1858 he was elected mayor of the town. At the approach of the foreboding clouds of the civil war, he ardently espoused the cause of his section and State, and favored the prompt resumption of its sovereignty, and its withdrawal from the Union. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1861, and as soon as the *status* of political affairs were settled in his State he enlisted as a private in the volunteer army of the Confederacy. The same purpose and devotion to duty which had characterized his professional career marked him as an efficient soldier and invited promotion. He was made successively captain, major and lieutenant-colonel, and was an officer of high standing. His services extended throughout the campaigns of the Trans-Mississippi Department, and at the close of the war he returned to the practice of law at Seguin.

In 1866 he was a member of the convention assembled to form a Constitution for the State in conformity with the Johnson policy of reconstruction, and was soon after elected judge of his judicial district, but was removed on the usurpation of military power in 1867. In 1873 he served as a member of the House in the Thirteenth Legislature, and in the fourteenth he was a member of the Senate. In 1875 he was appointed associate justice of the Supreme Court, but was retired by the new Constitution of 1876, which required the court to consist of only three judges. His decisions are found in the forty-fourth and forty-fifth volumes of Texas Reports. His assiduous habits and fondness for close analytical investigation, his natural inquisitiveness of mind, firm and well grounded convictions through legal training, and ample resources of both principle and precedent, made him an excellent Supreme judge, and his decisions manifest a steady and profound search for truth and justice. His opinion in *Lewis v. Aylett*, 45 Texas, 190, first settled the principle in Texas jurisprudence that real estate can not pass by a nuncupative will. In this case he traces the power of devising real estate from its origin in the Statute of Uses, through its enlargement by the abolition of feudal tenures, when the

custom of making nuncupative wills was engrafted upon it by necessity, to which it had always been restricted. He showed that there was nothing in the jurisprudence of Texas that warranted the extension of the power of nuncupative devise to real property under the allodial tenures of the State, and in regard to the competency of devisees to establish a verbal devise of personal estate he adds: —

“Every dictate of humanity, and the daily lessons of life warn and teach us of the folly and impropriety of placing not only the fortunes, but the lives of the sick, aged and afflicted at the mercy and avarice of the corrupt and the vicious. That a code of laws should allow devisees to go before a clerk or judge on an *ex parte* proceeding, and prove a verbal will giving to strangers an estate, leaving kindred and family without provision, can not be readily admitted, and it would deserve universal condemnation.”

So confirmed and justly recognized was his character for integrity, executive ability and perfect devotion to the interests of the State, that, in 1882, he was elected Governor of Texas by more than one hundred thousand majority of the popular vote. His advent to the executive office was at a period of comparative prosperity, when the spirit and pride of the people were ardently enlisted for the advancement of the various public institutions of the State, in which he also shared, and the succeeding Legislature made large appropriations for that purpose, which he carried out to the letter. This caused a deficiency in the treasury at the close of his first administration, which was seized upon by his opponents, who were actuated by purposes chiefly of a personal and selfish character, to defeat his re-election. The free grass system had resulted in the enclosure of large bodies of land by the leading stockmen of the State, often enveloping and shutting in the smaller herdsmen, and excluding them from access to the water-courses. This produced an organized system of fence cutting, which was extended to lawful owners as well as to intruders upon the public lands, and so outrageous and universal had grown this evil, that the Governor convened an extra session of the Legislature in January, 1884, to

devise a remedy for this species of lawlessness. Stringent and efficient laws were enacted for its suppression, which the Governor executed with his characteristic promptness and vigor; and even this was sought to be used to his prejudice and to impair his popularity. But the innate justice of the people approved and appreciated alike his motives and his official acts, and at the Houston convention in August, 1884, he was unanimously re-nominated, and was re-elected by a majority vote of more than one hundred thousand.

It has been truly said that there are times when even the virtues of men provoke hostility; as Tacitus expresses it, '*nec minus periculum ex magna favia quam ex malo.*' But Governor Ireland has never once swerved from his principles or the line of his conscious rectitude to conciliate his enemies or to soften opposition. But with motives based upon principle, not policy, he has at all times boldly proclaimed his views, and fearlessly practiced the precepts of his conviction and the dictates of his judgment. He abides that public appreciation which never fails to do justice to noble ends attained by pure motives and upright means.

He is a man of rare self-respecting dignity, and possesses the virtues of steady independence and sober reliance, which never spring from a commonplace mind. Starting in life amid circumstances by which thousands of our brightest geniuses have been overwhelmed, he peered through the clouds of obscurity, and having once caught a glimpse of possibility, he fixed an unswerving aim upon success, and in the prime of life his sterling traits of character bear him onward in the achievement of usefulness and merit. His career has been one of incessant labor; at the bar in sedulously pursuing the interests of his clients, in the thorough preparation of his cases, in the study of both sides of every question—the possibilities of defeat as well as the possibilities of success; on the bench, in the indefatigable search for the true principles of justice, and in the executive chair, in conscientious efforts to perform the duties of his office in the promotion of the public weal.

He has an abiding faith and lofty pride in the great destiny of his State, and his official course, while unwarpd by the demands of faction, has sought to harmonize the varied and often conflicting interests of the great Commonwealth over which he presides.

Governor Ireland is a thorough Democrat of the pure Jeffersonian school; firm, conservative and honest in his convictions, he throws the open banner of his principles to the public view, and while yielding full accord to the political changes really effected by the civil war, he is tenderly mindful of the rights of his State, and has cherished a ready endeavor to promote its welfare in spite of faction and independent of Federal remissness.

The defective reciprocity in the surrender of criminals in the new treaty between the United States and the Republic of Mexico has subjected the whole western border of Texas to the incursions of thieves and murderers from the Mexican States bordering upon the Rio Grande. This has occasioned great trouble to his administration, and upon the failure of strenuous efforts to obtain Federal protection, he has asserted his intention of preventing these evils by the militia of the State. But the change of principles and policy of the general government effected by the advent of a Democratic administration, bearing a juster regard for the rights and welfare of all sections of the country, will doubtlessly relieve him from this necessity.

With these abnormal exceptions, so firm and vigorous has been his enforcement of the laws, that at no time has crime been less prevalent, life and property safer, or the general tenor of society more even and uniform in the pursuit of happiness in Texas than during his administration.

Taught from his earliest youth in the school of self-reliance and independent action, Governor Ireland keeps his own counsel and panders to no element of society. He is a man of iron will, and in his official capacity acknowledges no suzerainty but the requirements of law, the demands of duty, the dictates of his own judgment and the welfare of the State. His manners are dignified and reserved, yet he is generous and kind in his disposition, and

a true friend to those who gain his respect and confidence. There is nothing ostentatious or artificial in his character; but, solid and practical in his intellectual composition, his conduct is impressed with the qualities of his mind, and he preserves a steady equanimity in both.

To say that he is devoid of strong prejudices would be an attempt to destroy the equilibrium in which nature poises her endowments; but he lives upon an official plane too high for their exercise, and the dormancy of these is but the counterpart of the active traits which shape and model his character into an orb of usefulness and eminence as a lawyer, statesman and citizen.

His qualities eminently fit him for the times and events of his administration, during which, the troubles alluded to and the lawlessness of the border, have been entirely suppressed. He has administered the affairs of the State with a well-defined grasp and vigor. He is a man who cares little for exterior show or ceremonious effect, and at his second inauguration his address, which he read from a small sheet of paper, was in dignified and modest contrast with the vain display which modern usage has introduced into installment exercises. But Texas has no statesman of sounder judgment, or of more fidelity and fortitude in the promotion and protection of its interests and rights.

Governor Ireland has been twice married. His first wife was Mrs. Matilda W. Fanelott, whom he wedded in 1854, and who lived but a short time. He was again married in 1857 to Miss Anna W. Penn, of Mississippi, a lady whose noble qualities and accomplishments embellish his official life and adorn her station.